

22 June 1944

TO: Deputy Director, SSO
FROM: Capt. M. O. Benson, A.C.

Attached please find report covering my
work and experiences with Marshal Tito and the
Yugoslav Partisans.

Melvin O. Benson

Melvin O. Benson
Captain, A.C.

Job 81-815R, Box 532

CONTENTS

<u>REPORT</u>	<u>PAGE</u>
Summary.....	1
Background	3
Four Months with Tito's Partisans	5
Shipping Operations at Vis	39
Relations with Force 133	41

APPENDICES

- (1) Directive from Capt. Tofte, Chief of Shipping Operations
- (2) Copy of Report on Doctor Josip Smoloka, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Partisan Provisional
- (3) Italian Capitulation in Split
- (4) Letter from Professor Zvonimir Petricki
- (5) Letter from Major J. E. Burke, O. C., British Military Mission, Dalmatia
- (6) Additional Observations to the Director of OSS-ME
- (7) Signal sent to Lt. Ben Welles
- (8) Letter to Brigadier MacLean

SUMMARY

On August 22, 1943, I parachuted as the first American into Marshal Tito's Headquarters in Bosnia. That same evening I had my first interview and dinner with Marshal Tito. I was received with genuine enthusiasm and assured fullest cooperation to learn for myself about the Partisan movement.

During my entire four months stay with the Partisans one thing that was always a source of embarrassment and annoyance was the misrepresentation of Yugoslav news over the New York and London radios. The giving of credit to the Chetniks for Partisan victories and otherwise referring to them as Patriots in an attempt to include the Chetniks with the Partisans was impossible to explain.

In September I travelled with the first Proletarian Division, which was commanded by General Popovic, in their advance from Bosnia to Split and their subsequent evacuation of Split. I had excellent opportunity to observe the efficiency and discipline of the organization.

At Split I was the American representative when the Italian Armistice agreement was drawn up and signed by General Emilio Becuzzi, Commander of "Bergamo" division.

From November 10th to December 22nd, I was at Vis, with occasional visits to the other island, acting as shipping agent and liaison between the Partisan Economic

Delegation and the OSS shipping operations at Bari. During this period approximately 6,000 tons of varied supplies were brought to the Island in Yugoslav ships under OSS supervision and initiative.

On three occasions I was privileged to witness the Partisans during an attack. I observed for myself the courage and tenacity of the fighting Partisans. I became acquainted with many of the leaders of the movement and was told amazing stories of their struggle against cold and hunger as well as their enemies.

On December 22nd I was recalled to Cairo base as a gesture toward the British because of an observation I made in a signal to which Brigadier MacLean took exception. At the time I sent this signal I was the only American with the Partisans while the British were represented by approximately two hundred officers and men. Also the OSS Shipping Operations controlled by American personnel was the only material support being given to the Partisans during that period.

BACKGROUND

Before I was assigned to Cairo base of OSS/SO in February 1943, I had been associated for over a year with the British SOE and I had already started preparing myself to go into Yugoslavia under supervision of SOE. By the end of April, I had completed all special training and qualified as a parachutist. However, I did not go on operations with the first SOE mission to Tito's Partisans in June because OSS had not come to any working agreement with SOE. Finally in August the British permitted me (as the first American) to join their mission at Tito's Headquarters privileged to communicate with OSS Cairo over their radio.

Being dependent on the British radio and operator was not entirely satisfactory. Difficulties of keeping batteries charged, and the need for minimum time on the air, coupled with the fact that quite often we were moving from place to place, made a duplication of messages most impractical. The British officer and I together obtained all the information which he transmitted and although I called this to the attention of my Commanding Officer at Cairo, I feel that my work was judged by the few signals I sent rather than by the work done by the Anglo-American mission.

Prior to dropping into Yugoslavia, I had spent considerable time studying the language, reading all the

latest reports, and conferring with officers most familiar with the current situation. Reliable information about the Partisans at that time was very meager and the need of having an American observer with Tito's Headquarters was urgent. To avoid appearing to take sides, another American officer was dropped at Mihailovitch's Headquarters at the same time as I joined Tito.

REPORTFour Month's with Tito's PartisansFirst Experiences

At 2:30 o'clock in the morning of 22 August 1943 I parachuted alone into Bosnia, Jugoslavia, in the area known as Metropolje. Around the main signal fire I was welcomed by Lt. Col. Bill Deakin and Major Basil Davidson, British Liaison Officers. Major Davidson had dropped in two nights previously. With them was Gen. Vlatko Velevit, the Partisan Liaison Officer, now in London. It was a great moment for me as I was the first American to begin work with Tito's Partisans. A few days later Major Davidson departed for another area to establish his mission and I remained with Deakin, who had been with the Partisan Supreme Staff during the fierce fighting in Montenegro when the Germans made a terrific effort completely to wipe out the Partisans.

First Meeting with Tito

In the evening of this same day I met and had dinner with Tito. He was most friendly and assured me that I would be given fullest cooperation and that he was pleased to have an American observer present. The New York radio broadcasts had given plenty of cause for belief that the facts about the Partisans were either not known or willfully misrepresented. Tito said I would be given assis-

tance in moving about the country to see things for myself and I was privileged to talk with anyone at anytime. He thought that groups of Slovenes, Croats, Serbs, etc. in America, if accurately informed about the Partisans movement in Yugoslavia would give material support as well as moral. He spoke with bitterness about Draja Mihailovitch and the Government-in-Exile, branding them as traitors and criminals who were collaborating with the Axis to fight the Partisans. Later events gave ample evidence to prove such collaboration.

A copy of the Partisan Order of Battle was furnished Deakin and I was surprised at the extent and organization of this Army of Liberation which was generally thought of as groups of guerillas.

During our discussion we had been sampling the native plum brandy, "rakija". Tito smoked chain fashion using a miniature pipe as cigarette holder. He was much pleased with some American cigarettes which I had brought with me.

This meeting took place inside a forest of tall cedar trees. The makeshift table had large logs along either side for us to sit on and above was stretched a piece of canvas. Dinner was presently served by a plain looking young woman who, aside from a small pistol, carried two hand grenades on the belt around her waist.

Later I learned the grenades were for self destruction in event of capture by Cetniks or Ustashi. The large portions of mashed potatoes with thick gravy and large pieces of roast lamb were a special treat and were eaten without time for conversation.

Having satisfied our appetites, the talk turned to recalling incidents both tragic and amusing. Tito displayed a large poster showing his picture and the offer of one hundred thousand marks in gold as reward for his capture, dead or alive. He recalled an occasion when they had captured some Italian tanks and, not having any tank drivers, they used the Italian drivers at pistol point. In their escape from the German encirclement in Montenegro they had been bombed and strafed continuously. The day was recalled on which Capt. Stewart, British ISLD, was killed and Lt. Col. Deakin was wounded in the foot. At this same time Tito received a bomb splinter in his arm and his dog, lying alongside his head, was killed outright. At that time he lost his valued sub machine gun. He expressed great interest in the American Tommy gun, which he knew about as a favorite weapon of gangsters. I made him a gift of the one I had with me, and several weeks later I saw him with it always within easy reach. At that time his real name and information concerning his background were being kept secret.

Move To Jajce

Two days later we prepared to move to Jajce, a town known to Tourists for its old Turkish fort and the beautiful water falls of the Vrbas river. We purchased two pack horses from peasants, paying nine gold sovereigns for each one. All available animals were used for carrying equipment. We had one riding horse to share between five of us. Until dusk we kept the column fairly well separated because of recce aircraft. Later we closed up. After dark the going became very difficult. We had climbed one side of a large mountain and were following a twisting, rocky trail down the opposite side. It was a stumbling job and went on for hours. All the time, the trail zigzagged through the large trees growing thick on the steep slope. Near midnight, having started early in the afternoon, we arrived at a small village where the pack horses were rested and we tried to sleep. The walking had made us warm, and now we froze. The altitude here was about four thousand feet.

Around two o'clock we were again moving. The country, as the sun rose, was extremely beautiful. Most of the walking was down hill now and at frequent intervals there would be pools of cold, fresh water from the inside of the mountain. Then we could see Jajce across the valley, still a long ways away. Later the trail turned into a country road which followed the Vrbas.

River. The yards around the neat looking houses were orderly and clean. In the gardens were numerous plum orchards; vegetables, especially cabbage, seemed plentiful. At one place on the river bank a woman was doing some washing and singing a cheerful song at the top of her voice as she worked.

As we entered Jajce the townspeople watched us with great interest. This was the third time the Partisans had held Jajce. A vacant house was located for our mission, and after filling up on stew, we spread our blankets on the floor and soon were fast asleep.

The Partisans took Bugojno after three days of hard street fighting from house to house. The captured railway with locomotive and cars was immediately put into service between Jajce and Bugojno. The old Church in Jajce was opened the first Sunday after we arrived. It had been closed for two years. The church overflowed with the peasant women in their different native costumes who had come on foot many miles.

That evening a propaganda meeting was held in the cultural hall at which Tito with members of the Supreme Staff, Deakin and myself were front and center for everyone to look at. The speeches and singing were very enthusiastically received. The platform was decorated with a large sketch of Tito on one side, and of Stalin on the other.

The following day the main street was crowded with young farmers, eager to join up with the Partisans. They liked to examine closely the insignia on my uniform and the boots and clothes I was wearing. They were most awed at my .45 Colt Automatic. There was plenty of evidence that the Partisans had the backing of the people generally in this area.

On market day the peasants brought lots of produce to town which had not been the case before. All food supplies were either paid for or requisitioned against future payment. Also, the Partisans have very harsh regulations against plundering or molesting local populations. We could buy honey, wine, cheese, eggs, as well as fruit and vegetables. Either Croatian kuna, Italian lira or dinars were used in payment.

Partisan Movement Background

In May 1941, the German troops entered Serbia and the Quizling government was formed. The Communist Party started organizing by distribution of pamphlets and collection of arms. On June 22nd the Germans attacked Russia, and the same day the Communist Party issued a general call to revolt. The Germans began a roundup of all left wing sympathizers. Risings occurred in several places and there was burning of German lorries and attacks on German soldiers in Belgrade. The Kragujevac Branch of the Agrarian Party were first to join the Communist lead.

Later, In October 1941, when the Partisans took Cacak, the Radical Democrats and Peasant parties' local organizations opened relations with them. These same groups came together in the Uzice area.

By autumn of 1941 the Partisans had mobilized about 15,000 men. In November 1941 the Partisans and Cetniks parted company. Mihailovitch went to Ravna Gora with about 500 men. The Partisans retired over Zlatibor to Nova Varos. Here the First Proletarian Brigade was organized.

The first Partisan groups consisted of young communists, but later many intellectuals and peasants joined and the purely communistic character was lost. The Partisans at first made a mistake by emphasizing straight line revolution rather than popular resistance against occupying forces. However, spontaneous resistance was provoked by atrocities of the Ustashi and Italians. During the early stages they called themselves the "Partisan and Volunteer Army". This later grew into the National Army of Liberation. They wore the national flag instead of the Red Star on their caps. The organization under Mihailovitch was supported by officers, gendarmes, minor tax and customs officials, and frontier guards concerned with preserving their former standard of living.

Living and Medical Conditions

Our Partisan friends, desiring to make our living

conditions as comfortable as possible, provided us with box like beds in which were large bags of corn husks serving as mattresses. They proved easy enough to lie on, but the swarms of bed bugs made sleeping almost impossible.

One evening Major Mackenzie, British doctor, arrived from Bugojno where he had attended the wounded in the front line fighting. With him, as interpreter, was Olga Humo. The doctor told about some amputations he had done under most primitive conditions. Medical supplies of all kinds were practically non-existent. Bandages had to be taken from one patient, quickly washed and used on a more severe case.

Olga Humo was the daughter of the Yugoslav Foreign Minister to England. She spoke perfect English and told us about her capture and escape from the Gestapo. It was quite a coincidence that a signal from Cairo the following morning was a request from Olga's father to learn whether she had been killed or not when in the hands of the Germans.

First Proletarian Division

On the same evening that the news of the Italian capitulation was received, Tito requested that Major Deakin and I proceed to Split at once to assist in obtaining the arms and stores from the Italians. Within an hour we were underway with our wireless operator, Walter. We went from Jajce to Bugojno by car. Here we joined

the First Proletarian Division which was going to make a forced march to Split. This Division, under command of General Koca Popovic, at that time numbered 6,000 crack troops. Everyone has proved himself or herself in battle. To belong to the First Proletarian Division is considered a form of promotion. They all wear the hammer and sickle emblem on the red star. The only others to wear it are the Political Commissars.

General Popovic is a "Hero of Yugoslavia" for continuous feats of courage. He is only 34 years old and the son of a wealthy family from Belgrade; university educated, he has been interested in the Leftist Movement. From 1936 to 1938 he served in the International Brigade in Spain. His second in command is Colonel Miloyevic. He is very popular and a great fighter. He has been wounded several times and lost one eye in battle. He is 30 years old, and has the honor of being "Hero of Yugoslavia". He was one of the delegates to Cairo.

Lt. Col. Deakin and I were provided with a couple of good riding ponies. At 5:00 o'clock in the morning along with General Popovic, we galloped to pass up the 1st Brigade with which we would be travelling. The other three brigades travelled as separate units. Arriving ahead of the column we took up a position from which we could watch it go by. Leading the column was a battalion of fairly well equipped riflemen. Only a few

had machine guns and the others all had Italian rifles with bandolier of ammunition clips. Then followed numerous pack horses and mules carrying hospital equipment, food supplies, the field kitchen, only one small mountain gun. Most of the animals were being led by women. One elderly woman was herding along a flock of ten sheep. Also in the column were several cows, a bull, and a couple of steers. There was a group of about fifty new recruits, still wearing peasant costume and without rifles. They looked to be fourteen or fifteen years old. General Popovic said we would get them weapons along the way.

The March to Split

With only occasional five minute rest periods, we kept moving until 3:00 o'clock in the afternoon. We had been passing through sparsely wooded country and were now on the edge of an open valley. We established staff headquarters under some trees on a small knoll just outside a little village. A peasant woman came by with a bucket full of sour milk. This was passed around and we all had a healthy swig. Later we had more food and a short sleep.

At 9:00 o'clock the brigade assembled again and an all night march got under way, everything running smoothly without any shouting of orders or any fuss. The moon was high, and everyone seemed in excellent spirits. There

was enthusiastic singing of Partisan songs.

We arrived at Mokromze at 6.00 o'clock the following morning, having passed through three villages which had been burned out several times by the Ustashi. At once we were assigned to an upstairs room in a house formerly the property of a Ustashi. The boys were busy unpacking the radio and putting up the aerial when we heard a burst of machine gun fire. Looking out of our windows we saw a Ustashi truck about four hundred yards down the road. Seven fellows jumped out and started running for cover. One was shot immediately, two others fell before they got off the road. Partisans with rifles appeared from all directions racing across the fields toward the spot. There were two more trucks coming up behind the first. Our boys cleared up the whole lot in short order and took the three trucks which were loaded with supplies.

It seems that by taking a short cut across country we had missed a Ustashi column over 500 strong, following the road to attack Bugojno. These trucks were bringing this column supplies from their base at Tomislavgrad. General Popovic had planned to attack this base that night. Now they advanced on it right away, since only a few Ustashi would be there.

Attack by the Ustashi

We relaxed for about five minutes after this excitement and prepared to have breakfast. Suddenly, at 7.00 o'clock when we were only half unpacked, we were told to waste no time in getting under way. It was believed that another column of over 500 Ustashi had come from Livno to join the first group in the attack against Bugojno. They were already on the hill shooting at us. We made a dash for it as bullets whizzed by within a couple of feet of our heads. Most of our riflemen had gone to take Tomislavgrad but the remaining ones soon took up positions and there was firing all around. The pack train was being rushed along at top speed. We passed it up galloping like never before. The order was to get away and get away fast. Some mule drivers were having difficulties with hurridly packed loads falling off. Others, as they drove their animals through the hail of bullets, ran in a crouched position using the animal and pack as a shield. Eventually we arrived at a place where the pack train could be dispersed in case of air attack. There we waited to learn what was happening below in the valley.

We got the complete story later. It seems that about 40 or 50 Ustashi returning from somewhere found our column strung out across their line of march. They wanted to pass across, so they started firing. They killed one

Partisan and wounded four, capturing the horses carrying our kitchen equipment. Two of our cooks were among those wounded. In the meantime, the Partisans had taken Tomislavgrad, capturing rifles, uniforms, as well as food stores. Seven prisoners were taken. Two of these were shot and the others released.

Never had food tasted so good as it did that evening. Since the all night march we had had a full day of excitement without time for either breakfast or lunch. We went to sleep fully dressed, including our boots, in case the night should bring more surprises.

Organization of the National Army of Liberation

The National Army of Liberation is divided into eight corps with Marshal Tito as supreme commander. The breakdown is into divisions which average 4 to 6,000 men, staff and liaison company, three or four brigades and one artillery group. The brigade averages 1,200 to 2,000 men, staff group, three to five battalions and one heavy machine gun company. A battalion consists of staff and three to four companies, each with 300 to 500 men.

All over the liberated territory are Partisans detachments based on local areas and used for training new recruits. These may be anywhere from 150 to 1,500 men. The larger units have some radio contact with general headquarters or even telephone communication.

Young boys of about fourteen years, armed with rifles and hand grenades, ride fast ponies, acting as couriers, often through the enemy lines. There are many women who carry rifles and march with the men. They are dressed and the same and fight the same as their brothers or husbands. Moral standards are very strict and as a rule husband and wife do not serve in the same unit.

Trip to Split (continued)

In order to hurry on to Split we left Tomislavgrad at 8.00 o'clock in the evening, and keeping a good pace for eight hours we arrived at a place called Kamenica. There we were met by some Partisans in a small fiat automobile and a small Italian truck. They said the road to Split was Partisan controlled. General Popovic and Major Deakin joined the men in the fiat and I followed in the truck with our equipment and escort. All told we were about sixteen people hanging on to this small truck. At one point the driver swerved to avoid a bomb crater and before he could straighten out, the truck lay over on its side. Fortunately nobody was hurt. Later on the gears stripped and we had to wait for another lorry to come and pick us up.

At noon we arrived in Zadvarje. There the local big shot told us we were expected and that General Popovic had told him to put us up at the hotel until we received further instructions. We were given plenty of good wine

and food, and a chance to wash.

While we were relaxing, at 2.00 o'clock our boys dashed in and shouted for us to run for it, that the Germans were entering the town. We grabbed our guns and, leaving all our kit except the radio, we ran a couple of blocks where we caught a lorry just getting started. As we were heading out of town in the direction of Split a dozen Stukas circled around strafing the town and highway. We piled out and scattered in the ditch. It was a desperate scramble for the best cover. Explosive bullets came within a few feet. One direct hit on the rear tire of our truck put it out of action. We started running along the road, having to hide in culverts, the ditch, or vineyards several times as planes came back to strafe again and again. Eventually another truck happened along and carried us to headquarters just outside of Split.

Italian Armistice Events

The following day, Sept. 17th, I attended as American representative a conference at which the terms under which the Italians turned their weapons and equipment over to the Partisans were debated. Present were General Popovic and Doctor Ivo Ribar. Tito's representatives. (Dr. Ribar was later killed by a bomb; his father is President of the National Committee of Liberation.) Major John Burke of the British Mission for Dalmatia attended the conference

with Lt. Col. Deakin. We were dealing with General Emilio Becuzzi, in command of the Italian "Bergamo" Division. His foremost concern was that through our radio a message might be sent informing his wife that he was safe. With General Becuzzi were two of his staff.

There was no question about turning the weapons and stores over to the Partisans as they had already taken possession and were busy moving everything up into the mountains. The problem was the thousands of unarmed Italians who were left without any food. The Partisans were riding in automobiles wearing new Italian boots and uniforms and enjoying good wine and captured foods.

The armistice paper was agreed on, and signed (copy attached to previous report). The most important clause was that the British officers and I were committed to advising our respective governments that in Split were 15,000 unarmed Italian soldiers with only five days meager rations and no means of evacuation. A couple of nights later a convoy did arrive to evacuate these soldiers, and General Becuzzi and staff were the first to get aboard.

Deakin returned to Bosnia to meet the British Brigadier Fitzroy MacLean, who was due to arrive. I stayed on with Maj. Burke. From Sept. 20th we were on the alert to get out of Split in a hurry if necessary. Every day troops

concentrations in the vicinity and the Italian barracks were bombed by Stukas. There was always a chance that the Germans would make a break through from Klis. They had attempted to reinforce Klis with a column of 800 from Sinj. The Partisans attacked and killed 500 of them, 150 escaped back to Sinj and at that time 150 were trapped in a house and would be liquidated. After the first bombing of Split, 20 German prisoners were promptly shot.

We were living in a villa right on the water's edge enjoying two swims a day. Since I had lost my shaving kit I had the services of an Italian barber. He, like all the other Italians, who joined the Partisans, was very bitter in his denunciation of the Fascists.

One evening Maj. Burke had gone to the dropping ground as a sortie of desperately needed anti-tank guns was expected. I attended a music program at the Opera House in Split. General Popovic, Doctor Ribar, two staff officers and I were together. I felt like a show window. The crowd, practically all civilians, kept staring at me not knowing whether I was English or American. Another night I made the acquaintance of Mr. Zvonimir Petricki, professor of English, who at that time was working on the Partisan newspaper "Slobodna Dalmacija". His story on what happened in Split immediately after the Italian Capitulation I have already included in a previous report.

When the Italians received orders from Zara not to resist the Germans and that the latter were already on their

way from Sinj, it was a signal for a general uprising. The Italians were disarmed by the population, in some cases even by children and women. Thousands of people took the road to Zryovnica, the first rallying point. From there they were to proceed to Partisan headquarters in the mountains. The Italians handed over their arms, ammunition, stores, etc., very willingly. Most of the lorry drivers remained on their vehicles and helped the transportation of quantities of war materials to the mountains. The civil administration was taken over by the Committee of National Liberation headed by Doctor Josip Smolaka, who is now minister of Foreign Affairs for the Provisional Government. For the Italians in Split a special bulletin entitled "Liberta" was printed. It was issued in the name of the Committee of National Liberation, but the editor was an Italian captain and the staff consisted of anti-fascists.

The professor had invited me to see him again and visit his home. I took Maj. Burke with me and we spent a very enjoyable evening with Professor Petricki and his wife in their comfortable home. We had real tea out of china tea cups. The conversation dealt with the Italian occupation and their collaboration with Chetniks. When we departed, we were given half a dozen books to take with us as we had nothing to read during our spare time. Less

than a week later we shared these books with the professor himself whom we met freezing up in the mountains with Doctor Smodlaka. He had evacuated Split without having time to go from his office to his home for even an overcoat or tooth brush.

Evacuation of Split

On the 24th of September we abandoned Split. Maj Burke and I had a black buick sedan at our disposal. That buick went through bomb craters, across country where bridges had been demolished and over rocky trails as well as any jeep. We were depending on the Partisans to get us to a point of reasonable safety.

To quote from my log, under the date of 26th September: "This morning we are with the Partisan officers huddled together in a peasant's house in Muslimi Gornj. It is raining hard and everyone seems to feel miserable. We are entirely surrounded by the enemy. There seems to be indecision on the part of the officers. We have been ready for immediate travel since last evening. Slept with our boots on. About five miles down the valley the German big guns are laying down a barrage. Several hundred refugees from Split have added to the problem. We have been eating bread and sardines."

The officers of the 4th Operational Zone, which grew into the Eight Corps, were with us at this time. There was Col. Ilic, regular engineer officer of the Yugoslav

Army. His wife was killed by the Germans so he joined the Partisans. Major Melic was his Chief of Staff. Only 27 or 28 years old, he was a university student from Split who had served two years in the Spanish war. He was very popular in Dalmatia. Also in our group was General Skorpic who had been commandant of the Split Garrison of Yugoslavia before the war. He had two sons who were both killed in service. Because of his vast experience he was later made commandant of the Officers Training School at Jajce.

Our constant companion was Doctor Leonard Karli, professor of Political Science from the University of Belgrade. Thirty-six years old, he was a very close friend of Tito's. A political power, he was more concerned with intelligence and secret police work.

We finally did strike out from our peasant shack that evening. Moving silently through the darkness, we frequently stopped to send a scouting party ahead to investigate suspicious places ideal for ambush. To refer again to my log, on 27 September "At 1.00 A.M. we crossed the Cetina River. Shortly afterwards the rain poured down so hard that it forced us to take refuge in a peasant barn. Here we slept on the dirt floor until early this morning when we started moving. At daybreak we were resting in a woods when a Ustashi place came over. On its

second circle one of our boys brought it down with machine gun fire. All the Partisans in the vicinity went wild with happiness and shot off their rifles. We were not the only ones who thought there was a surprise attack and started dashing further up the mountain side.

From brigade headquarters we watched the fighting in the valley which continued all day and night. General Skorpic and Doctor Karli were with Capt. Burke and me. General Popovic and Col. Miloyovic dropped by occasionally, as did Doctor Ribar. There was no food. The fleas and lice from the barn floor we had slept on were annoying us plenty. We crowded into a peasant hut among the filthiest surroundings I have ever seen. The dirty old woman made some coarse bread for us from some hog feed out of an open feed box sitting in the corner. I was hungry but not that hungry. Later somebody produced a cup full of rice which we boiled and somebody else had a small can of jam. We stirred the jam into the rice. Although we only had one spoon among five of us, we didn't take long to get it all eaten.

The principal enemy concentration was at Imotski, with the base at Mostar. The Prinz Eugen Division went in the direction of Sinj to reinforce it and later move to Split. The Partisans met them on the way to Cista and inflicted heavy losses. It took the Germans six days to get from Imotski to Sinj.

The second point of concentration was Knin and Obrovac. One column went to reinforce Drnis and another column was going to Sinj escorted by Chetniks. The enemy's aim was to push the Partisans into the sea or to surround them and recapture the Italian equipment. Their plan failed. One Proletarian Brigade remained behind the German column to cut communications between Imotski and Sinj. The second and third brigades of the 9th Division were engaged in heavy fighting on the Klis-Sinj line. During the same time the 1st Brigade of 4th Division fought the column going from Knin to Sinj and the column from Drnis to Mac. The Sibenik brigade was fighting the Germans in that area. The Partisans succeeded in their plan to evacuate material to the north, part to the Cetina Valley and part to the Vrlika area. All boats in Split harbor went to the islands. The civilians who feared the Germans went either to the islands or mountains. Many of the Italians were evacuated by convoy. About 1,000 Italians, mostly technicians, joined the Partisans. What material could not be evacuated was destroyed, including vehicles, port facilities, locomotives and wagons, and two approach bridges.

In this area the Germans and Ustashi burned and plundered all the villages they passed through, to terrorize the population. One hundred civilians were reported

killed in Dicmo. Villages burned included Trilj, Grab, Bisko, Jabuka, Dugopolje, Koprivno, Kongiko and Solin. Four hundred Germans were reported to have been killed on the Drnis-Muc road.

The Partisans left small detachments behind for guerilla tactics. We carried on over the Dinaric Alps into Livansko Polje. Here we stopped for a couple of days at Gornje.

Capture of Livno and Kupres

By October 3rd General Popovic started to attack Livno. In the early morning we galloped with the staff for about four hours to reach a point from which we could watch the fight. We were met by a peasant who came from Livno saying the Ustashi had left immediately the attack started. Leaving our horses we all climbed into a truck and speeded into Livno. There was so much ammunition, guns, and food stores that the Partisans suspected some trick. We were rushed to a large monastery at the edge of town where we enjoyed wine with the Priests while the Partisans took over the town.

The attack was continued on to Kupres. Here, when the local garrison saw the captured Italian tanks approaching they lined up on parade and only realized their mistake when the Partisans in these six tanks opened fire at 100 yards range.

Visit of Brigadier Maclean

Now the road was clear for Brigadier MacLean to come to Livno from Jajce by car. The Partisans went to a great deal of trouble borrowing table linen and silverware from the townspeople in order to set a nice table for the Brigadier during his three day visit.

The Partisans still held a large stretch of the Dalmatian Coast as well as the islands and the bringing in of supplies by sea was feasible and urgent. The Brigadier decided to accompany Burke to the coast and see for himself what the situation was on the islands.

Livno was now the headquarters for the Eight Corps. The staff officers were a bit cool in their attitude toward us because so many promised sorties had failed to arrive. We had established several pinpoints as dropping areas and arranged for guards and transportation. The signal fires were fixed each night and camouflaged during the days. After over a month with only two small sorties and a lot of promises, the Partisans lost their enthusiasm. When a signal arrived saying a sortie was due, Major Burke would show it to Melic, the 8th Corps Chief of Staff, whose only comment would be "maybe?"

Meeting with Major Farish

Brigadier Maclean, instead of letting me go to the coast where the major activity was expected, sent me to Glamoc to join Major Farish, the only other American with the Partisans. He had arrived a few days before and came

to Glamoc from Jajce. He had been provided with a radio which didn't work, and a wireless operator who couldn't fix it. After four days of failing to make contact, Major Farish sent me to Jajce to exchange the radio and operator for a combination that would work. Later, Major Farish was provided with the best wireless operator available.

I then remained in Jajce where I lived with seven British officers in a comfortable villa which was Brigadier Maclean's headquarters. Major Farish remained at Glamoc, freezing with a starving detachment, from Oct. 11th to the 25th, waiting for an aircraft that never came.

American-handled supplies arrive

On the evening of October 23rd., Col. Velevit came to the villa in Jajce and announced that several tons of stores had been brought to the Island of Vis by the Americans. The stores included 35,000 battledress, 10,000 rifles, ammunition and 250 tons of food. The British officers told him that surely his information must be wrong. Obviously these supplies were the results of their work and that of Brigadier Maclean, who was on the islands somewhere. Incidentally, his radio had broken and he had not had any contact with the outside for two weeks. When Major Louis Huot unexpectedly arrived next day the story on the shipping business was

made clear. He was operating the Yugoslav ships and had been directly responsible for bringing supplies in by sea.

Contact with Major Huot

Major Huot was enthusiastically received by Tito and the Supreme Staff. We enjoyed a special dinner with the staff officers. No British personnel were present. I gave Major Huot a verbal report on what I knew about the Partisan officers with whom he had been in conversation; also as much general information as I had learned during the better than two months I had spent with the Partisans; photostats of some 55 captured documents showing Chetnik collaboration with the enemy; about a dozen envelopes containing collections of pictures taken by Partisans and given to me by the editor of the newspaper "Slobodna;" and recent issues of Partisan newspapers; my copy of the Italian armistice agreement drawn up at Split. Aside from the above I gave Major Huot four exposed rolls of 35 mm film (36 pictures per roll) which I had personally taken in Bosnia, including several shots of Tito, and a number taken in Dalmatia during the advance into Split and the subsequent evacuation of Split. A few days later I sent to him at Bari a fifth exposed film. These pictures were lost somehow and were not returned to me for incorporation in this report.

When Major Huot left for Italy on the 25th of October

he took Major Farish out with him and instructed me to work on the islands, concerning myself with the shipping business. Here I was glad again to become part of Major Burke's mission. At the moment the Germans were trying to take the Peljesac Peninsula.

Peljesac Peninsula Fighting

At Hvar I became acquainted with Commandant Gerni, head of the Partisan Navy Department; Col. Manola, head of the Coastal Command, and the Political Commissar, Peter Radovitch. Several other British officers were arriving at Hvar, so Major Burke and I decided to go to Peljesac and see the situation for ourselves. While at Korcula we received a message from the Brigadier that recalled Burke to Hvar before our front line visit. I carried on by myself.

I picked up an old ship captain at Orebic who acted as my interpreter. Together we proceeded along the rocky trail on mules, having two Partisan soldiers as guides. After three hours we arrived at the ransacked town of Golubinica, the headquarters for the forward troops. Here we spent the early evening in conversation with Major Niko Martinovic, Commander of the 26th Division and his Chief of Staff, Major Parmac Stanko. Then, at 9.00 o'clock we walked to the top of a mountain called Angelo. It took us over an hour of hard climbing to reach the top. Shortly after 11.00 o'clock we saw the white flare to our right on Mt. Zabrada indicating

the start of the attack. The fireworks made a large section of the mountain side light up like a Christmas tree. Just a bit later the attack against the German positions to our left, on Mt. Rota, commenced the same way. The two battles continued for over three hours. Quite often the numerous explosions of hand grenades indicated close-in fighting. On Mt. Rota the Germans were using at least one heavy mortar. On this night, as on that previous, the Partisans were forced to fall back, principally because the Germans had the advantage of being well entrenched on higher level with superior weapons. A similar attack the following night also failed with heavy casualties.

German Vandalism

We returned to Golubinica and after a couple of hours trying to sleep had some cooked rice and bread for breakfast. During the morning I toured four of the nearby villages which had been occupied for a very short time by the Germans a few days before. In Pijavicino I was told by survivors that 42 civilians had been killed. At Oskorune I saw the inside of the home in which the Germans had crowded 40 people and then tossed a grenade through the window killing nine people. I spoke to some who had escaped this horror only two days before. There were large pools of blood on the floor and bloody finger prints on the white painted doors where wounded people had apparently

staggered from one room to another. The Germans had ransacked all the houses, emptying all bureau drawers on the floor taking anything of value and tramping on the rest. Some of the German soldiers killed in the fighting were found to be wearing civilian clothes stolen from these homes. One dead German had his pockets full of somebody's dining room silverware. The returning civilians found their homes more or less wrecked, all blankets and warm clothing carried away, all livestock gone, and their large vats of wine spilled on the ground. Wine is the main product in this area.

Female Soldiers

In place of mules, my interpreter and I were provided with a couple of ponies to take us back to Orebic. We met a small detachment of reserves on their way to the front. This group of about 30 included eight young women in captured Italian uniforms with boyish haircuts. They carried the same rifles and extra ammunition as the men. They seemed in good spirits, singing their Partisan songs as they tramped along single file.

A Partisan "Battleship"

From Orebic I proceeded back to the headquarters at Hvar. It was a five hour trip in a Partisan "battleship." This old fishing schooner had an anti-tank gun mounted aft, a breda M.G. to starboard, and a fiat M.G. forward. Around

these guns as a shield was a three foot high box-like structure about ten inches thick, filled with gravel. Traveling at about 7 miles an hour we made the trip without incident.

Experiences at Vis

From November 10th to December 22nd I was at Vis, with occasional visits to the other islands, acting as shipping agent and liaison between the Partisan Economic Delegation and the OSS/SOE operations at Bari. There were some fourteen British Officers on the islands, with 40 or 45 other ranks, all engaged in keeping Bari and Cairo informed. The shipping operations have been thoroughly covered in previous reports. Approximately 6,000 tons of varied supplies were brought to the island in Yugoslav ships during this period. Capt. Hans Tofte and Lt. Robert Thompson handled things on the Bari end. The Partisans at Vis did an efficient job of unloading cargoes quickly during hours of darkness, and in storing or distributing the supplies received.

Another report which I submitted on 24 December covers in detail the military situation in Dalmatia and islands at that time. (See Report No. 013546).

Also another report describes conditions and events in Split after the Partisans evacuated (See Report No. 013280).

Establishment of the Provisional Government

I was at Hvar on December 5th when the details on the conference of the National Committee of Liberation were published. Josip Broz "Tito" was elected Marshal of the Army and President of the Provisional Government. Doctor Josip Smodlaka was named Minister of Foreign Affairs. After his speech at Hvar that evening he crossed to Vis on the same ship with me. I have in report dated 6 December given the life history of this 74-year-old lawyer and outlined the setup of the provisional government.

(Appendix 2)

To repeat part of Dr. Smodlaka's statement made to me on the boat to Vis: "The National Committee for Liberation of Jugoslvaia which has been formed by the chosen representatives of all democratic parties and drawn from all peoples, all religions and all parts of Jugoslavia, is not fighting for political questions but for the liberation of their homeland from German occupation. This National Committee is in full agreement with the Allies that the people of Jugoslavia must postpone the settlement of their own domestic government problems until after the War. They desire that a new and better Jugoslavia should be founded on a democratic basis. The Committee feels that the forming of a federation of all component provinces is the best solution for the country. In any case, this question will finally be decided after the deliberation

of an assembly freely elected by the people of Yugoslavia."

This statement has been practically duplicated to me by many other Partisan leaders.

Summary and Conclusions

1. The latest figure gives the total number of Partisan troops as 220,000. They are organized into a well disciplined army under the extremely popular leader, Marshal Tito. All the ones with whom I came in contact were tremendously enthusiastic and convinced that out of their struggle and sacrifice will emerge a new and better Yugoslavia.

2. This popular and rapidly growing Partisan movement was initiated by the Communist Party of Yugoslavia. However, the movement is supported by many who are not and never were Communistic. Dr. Smodlaka, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, and Dr. Ribar, President of the National Committee of Liberation are not Communists. These men and many others of the new provisional government are individuals who believe in democratic principles.

3. There are Partisan groups in all areas of Yugoslavia. They include Catholics, Orthodox, as well as Moslems. The vast majority came from the peasant class, but there are many from well-to-do families and also those who are technically trained. In the areas I visited, the civilian population cooperated with and seemed anxious to be of service to the Partisans.

4. Any compromise between Partisans and the Chetniks under Mihailovitch is impossible to hope for. The Chetniks have collaborated with the Axis partners in fighting the Partisans. Evidence of this collaboration was clearly established in the fifty-five captured documents which I handed to Major Huot, whom I presume has brought them to the attention of those interested. Ample confirmation of this collaboration was furnished by accounts given by civilians who had been witnesses to events during Italian occupation and subsequently became enthusiastic supporters of the Partisans.

5. The Partisans have in recent months expanded rapidly. Many of the new recruits have nothing except the ragged clothes they wear. The need for immediate supplies of arms, ammunition, food, clothing and medicines limits the extent to which they can carry the fight to the enemy. The hardships under which they exist cause a terrific wear and tear on boots and clothing. Now during the severe winter weather the scarcity of blankets along with their diet, which is definitely deficient in both fats and sugars, make the conditions under which they survive very difficult.

6. The Partisans often request air support of Allied planes for targets they wish to attack. Occasionally their ideas of a proper bombing target might be wrong. Since all the Partisans have either family or relatives in German occupied towns, the bombing of anything not completely military causes them grave concern. The air support should

definitely be given with great care taken to have accurate information on the target.

7. The Partisans are very proud of their accomplishments during the more than two years of continuous fighting. Their contribution to the Allied war effort more than justifies material support from us. Americans, generally speaking, are thought of as their friends whose actions speak louder than words. They do not think of us as having any intentions other than a desire to be friends. Our British allies do not enjoy the same confidence accorded the Americans.

8. The popularity of the United States suffered slightly during the period when, through lack of accurate information, and following the British policy, the New York radio broadcasts gave Mihailovitch credit for the fighting in Yugoslavia. It seems absurd and unjust to hear over the radio that Mihailovitch was the great hero of Yugoslavia. This applied to newspaper editorials and general publicity as well. Also the news that the American Government had made the Yugoslav Government-in-exile a gift of four Liberators was impossible to understand or explain.

SHIPPING OPERATIONS AT VIS

The extent, nature, and effectiveness of these "Shipping Operations" has been adequately covered in Captain Hans Tofte's report. My duties as liaison officer at VIS and HVAR are outlined in detail in directive received from Captain Tofte (Appendix - 1 -).

Frequent visits to the islands by Captain Tofte and Lt. Thompson offered opportunity for direct discussion of all problems. Also frequent traffic by MTB or Yugoslav boats to and from BARI made the exchange of notes between Captain Tofte, Chief of Shipping Operations, and myself very expedient. Dependence on British radio communication was not very satisfactory.

The Partisans on VIS working with Tito's Economic Delegation cooperated enthusiastically in the reception and distribution of supplies. The unloading of ships was done under cover of darkness. Supplies were stored in scattered places as precaution against loss by bombing. The numerous coves around the island served as convenient hiding places for the ships during day light. Camouflaged with branches from trees they were difficult for the reconnaissance aircraft to spot. Smaller boats were used to move supplies to pin-points established on the Dalmatian coast for transportation inland. The British motor torpedo boats were delivered a continuous supply of hundred octane gasoline.

The Yugoslav ships were also used for the transportation of critically wounded Partisans to Italy, and the evacuation of refugees.

Aside from the shipping activities, considerable current intelligence as to the military situation was obtained and transmitted to BARI base.

RELATIONS WITH FORCE 133

For the record I wish to state objectively the attempts of the British to undermine the OSS activities in Partisan Yugoslavia:

1) As indicated in my report Brigadier MacLean in October 1943 sent me to Glamoc to join Major Farish, the only other American with the Partisans. There was nothing at Glamoc but a small starving detachment. Farish had been assigned a wireless operator known by the British to be inexperienced. Also the radio provided, which could not be made to work, was the same one that had taken a terrific beating during the advance to Split and returned to Jajce with Lt. Col. Deakin. Previously it had served him in the difficult movements in the Montenegrin Campaign. There were four or five newer and better radio sets at MacLean's headquarters in Jajce at that time.

2) When I was installed at VIS to concern myself with the OSS Shipping Operations, a British captain was also stationed at VIS. This captain's main function was to transmit to Cairo the details of supplies received so that Cairo office of Force 133 could in turn pass this information on to some twelve or fifteen British missions in partisan liberated territory. These missions justified

their presence there by taking credit for the supplies brought across the Adriatic by OSS initiative.

3) While I was on VIS I had the use of the radio contact from HVAR to BARI operated by Force 133. It necessitated telephoning all messages from VIS to HVAR. All my signals from Captain Tofte were received at Hvar and, after decoding, were given to me over the telephone. These messages all had pertinent information as to what time ships could be expected, type of cargo, course to be followed, etc. Invariably when I received these signals, I would immediately go to the harbor-master only to learn that a few minutes earlier my message had been telephoned directly to him by the British Mission.

A P P E N D I C E S

APPENDIX - 1 -

C
O
P
Y

10 December 1943

TO: Captain M. Benson
FROM: Captain H. Tofte
SUBJECT: Shipping Operations

1. According to directive under which the OSS/SOE shipping operations between Italy and Yugoslavia are carried out, said operations are exclusively a O.S.S., SO. responsibility.
2. The O.S.S. officers operating the shipping in question are:

Captain Hans Tofte	Chief of Shipping Operations
1st Lt. R. E. S. Thompson	Executive Officer Ship. Opr.
1st Lt. W. Ellen	1/c Maintenance of vessels
2nd Lt. J. Hamilton	1/c Loading & Discharge of ships
Captain M. Benson	Liaison Officer at Vis & Hvar

3. Complete list of ships as per today's date attached for your guidance.
4. Today's Ships Position list attached for your guidance.
5. According to arrangements made to ensure communication between this base and yourself during Lt. Thompson's recent visit to the islands we shall inform you by wireless of all sailings from here simultaneously stating ETA for each vessel as well as description of cargo carried.
6. Likewise you are to inform this base by wireless about all return sailings from your port or other ports in the islands.
7. Your duties are as heretofore:
 - (a) To maintain satisfactory liaison with the Partisan Economic Delegation sent to the islands by Marshall Tito and now stationed at VIS 1/c of reception and distribution of supplies.

- (b) To maintain satisfactory liaison with Naval, military and Political commands on the islands.
- (c) To supervise - in cooperation with the proper Partisan authority - the off loading, camouflage and return dispatch of all vessels arriving with supplies from Italy.
- (d) To supervise that adequate tonnage is available at all times for distribution of supplies.
- (e) To send to this base a weekly report on shipping activities, confirming wireless messages and giving an accurate picture of the current situation in the islands from a shipping point of view.
- (f) To send to this base all information and military intelligence, which you may pick up through the liaison outlined in pp. "a" and "b".
- (g) To send to this base every suggestion which may serve to enhance the efficiency of Shipping Operations in question.
- (h) To keep a record of cargo landed at VIS by obtaining a copy of the manifest covering each voyage.

8. As regards our cable dated 9 Dec. 1943 ordering you to hold up all sailings from the islands until you received further instructions, take due notice of the following:

A. As from today you should visit every captain before he sails from your port and brief him as follows:

- 1. Make sure he knows the new route. You must obtain same from the Captain of M/V ORIZEN, who is due to arrive on 12 Dec. 1943.
- 2. Make sure he sails immediately it is dark, not before and not later. It is essential that he aims to be as close to the Italian coast as possible by daylight.

3. Give absolute orders to the effect that under no circumstances must any ship attempt to enter a port on the coast of Italy after dark. The Navy has flat orders to shoot without asking questions, and they shoot to sink. Ships which cannot make port till after dark must heave too for the night, and as regards the port of BARI, ships arriving late must keep well clear of the harbour, say 10 miles (rpt. ten miles).
 4. All ships from now on should sail to MONOPOLI as we are in the process of shifting the shipping base to that port, where Lt. Hamilton is temporarily in charge.
 5. All Captains must be questioned by you upon arrival at VIS about enemy activity observed, if any. Radio us any "gen" which we should know in planning sailings, routes, etc.
 6. All vessels leaving your port should sail only the route given to the Captain of m/v ORIEN until further notice. (Ref. #1).
- B. For your information the m/v SLOBODA, a newcomer, had a very narrow escape when she attempted to enter the port of BARI the other night. She was nearly sunk and, of course, placed under arrest.

Confirm receipt of this letter of instructions at your earliest possible convenience by safe hand, addressed to the undersigned.

s/s Hans V. Tofte
Hans V. Tofte
Captain, AUS.
Chief, Shipping
Operations.

10/12/43

APPENDIX - 2 -

6 December 1943

TO: Lt. Col. WEST

FROM: BENNY

SUBJECT: Doctor Josip Smodlaka,
Minister of Foreign Affairs for Yugoslav
Partisans

At Hvar yesterday the "Slobodna Dalmacija" published the attached extra reporting on the conference of the National Committee for liberation, JOSIP BROZ TITO has been elected marshal by this Committee. He is also president of the provisional government. Doctor JOSIP SMODLAKA was named Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Dr. Smodlaka made the crossing from Hvar to Vis on the same ship with me. Since he speaks English we engaged in conversation the entire trip. Incidentally, he evacuated Split in September this year at the same time I did, and I remember that he and the staff of the "Slobodna Dalmacija" had a very hard time walking over the mountains keeping up with us.

Dr. Smodlaka is 74 years old. He was a lawyer at Split up to 1914. During the first world war he was delegate in the Dalmatian Congress and Vienna Parliament. In 1904 he established at Split together with young intellectuals and farm workers the "Croatian Democratic Party" which was an attempt to unite Croats and Serbs into one country and also to break up the large estates. He managed the organization called "Sloboda". In 1909 he composed a party hymn which is today sung by Partisans. He was imprisoned by the Austrian government in 1914 and confined until 1917. After breakup of Austria he was head of the temporary government of Dalmatia. As member of the National Committee of Serb-Croat-Slovene he collaborated with the National Act for union in 1918. He was plenipotentiary delegate of Yugoslavia on the peace conference at Paris in 1919. In 1921 he issued the plan of a constitution for Yugoslavia in which he suggested federal organi-

zation of the country. After that he was ambassador of Yugoslavia to the vatican also to Madrid and later to Berlin. When dictatorship was proclaimed he gave up his diplomatic duties. He lived as private citizen at Split. During this time he wrote pamphlets about the need for changing the constitution on federalistic ideas and for the settlement of the Croation problems. These pamphlets were confiscated by the censors. He was president of the National Liberation Committee at Split. In November this year he visited TITO at his headquarters in Jajce. The present military situation prevents him from returning there so he will temporarily be staying at Vis.

I was given the following statement in answers to questions about the government.

"The course of our foreign politics has been shown by the heroic fighters of the liberation army. Our enemy is fascism and our allies are Russia, America, and Britian with whom we are fighting together to liberate the world of the fascistic menace. The "Atlantic Charter" which is their unity is also the foundation of our politics. For the future organization of our country and the deciding of boundaries we will insist that the will of the people be respected. Our people who by streaming blood have won liberation will never submit to domination by others. As we are not asking anything of foreigners, we will not allow that any part of our people be subjected to foreign domination. The aim of our foreign policy is to assure our people political liberty, social justice, and complete benefit of our new and better Yugoslavia which will be democratic and organized as a federation. On this agrees the Communist Party which has brought the people to fight for liberation. All other political groups who have the support of the people are fighting for this program.

We are certain that this program will be understood and agreed to by Allied countries who are governed by the same fundamental principles. of democracy and self determination. Especially since the Moscow conference we fully expect that Allies will not refuse their support to the National Committee which under Marshal Josip Broz "TITO" is fighting to establish this program."

APPENDIX - 3 -

2 January 1944

SUBJECT: Italian Capitulation in Split.

TO : Lt. Col. Paul West.

FROM : Benny

1. I arrived in Split on the 16th of September with the 1st Proletarian Division having travelled on foot and horseback cross country.

2. The following is the almost verbatim story as it was given to me by ZVONINIR PETRICKI, Professor of English, who lived in Split. I report it to show what reaction the Partisans might expect in entering other larger cities in Yugoslavia.

"After the capitulation of Italy on the 8th of September, the Split Committee of National Liberation organized a big demonstration on the Quay. Thousands of people turned out and gave expression to their immense enthusiasm. Cries of 'Long live our Allies', 'Long live England & America', 'Long live Tito', were repeated. When the small Italian tanks appeared, the crowd greeted them with applause. Italian lorries carrying soldiers and men and women from Split were going around town everywhere singing and cheering.

"Next day great crowds of people thronged the streets in order to see the first Partisans to enter Split and to see VICKO KRSTULOVICH, Commander of the 4th zone of operations, with the General commanding the BERGAMO Division.

"On the 11th of September at 9:00 A.M. German stukas suddenly attacked the harbor, sinking several ships and machine gunning the people on the quay. This attack was repeated in the course of the morning. At noon the news arrived that the Italians had received orders from ZARA not to resist the Germans and that the latter were already on their way from SINJ. This

was the signal for a general uprising. The Italians were disarmed by the population, in some cases even by children and women. Thousands of people took the road to ZRUOVNICA, the first rallying point, from here they were to proceed to Partisan Headquarters in the mountains. The Italians handed over their arms, ammunition, stores, etc., very willingly. Most of the lorry drivers remained on their vehicles and helped the transportation of huge quantities of war materials and stores to the mountains. It was a tremendous sight to see thousands of inhabitants of Split, young girls and boys, men and women migrating to the mountains to do everything in their power to beat the Nazis and Ustasha. In the mountains they were formed into units and the same evening sent to various fronts.

"On the 13th September Partisans took over the administration of Split. The Split district command made an appeal for volunteers. A meeting held on the evening of the 16th attracted the entire town. Speeches by Partisans and special singing was applauded loudly.

"Split was attacked daily by German Stukas owing to complete absence of any A.A. defence. They aimed at only military targets but private homes were also hit. After the panic of the first few days the people got used to the air raids and took them more calmly. New regulations were issued to the population and shelters marked. The often heard remark was 'Where are the Allies, why don't they send a few planes?'

"The civil administration was taken over by the Committee of National Liberation. It functioned satisfactorily in spite of the constant air raids, and lack of premises (The Italians police burned the buildings of the prefecture and municipality). Twice the Germans destroyed the aqueduct, and twice it was repaired in record time. The electric plants functioned regularly; the water supply was sufficient. Shops reopened and life took a more normal course. Shops were usually open from 5:00 to 7:30 A.M. and from 6:00 to 8:00 P.M.

"The population was regularly supplied with food. There were two distributions of meat during the week.

"Since 16 September 'SLOBODNA DALMACIJA', daily organ of the United Front of National Liberation of Dalmatis, was published in 16,000 copies. For the Italians a special bulletin entitled 'LIBERTA' was printed. It was issued in the name of the Committee of National Liberation, but the editor was an Italian Captain and the staff consisted of anti-fascists."

3. Attached to this report are:

- a. Two copies of the newspaper "SLOBODNA DALMACIJA" as it was turned out by hand in the mountains.
- b. Three copies of the "SLOBODNA DALMACIJA" printed in Split immediately after the Partisans entered.
- c. A copy of leaflet dropped over Split by the Germans on Sept. 9th.
- d. A copy of the first issue of the Italian newspaper "LIBERTA" mentioned in the story above.
- e. A copy of the Armistice agreement by which the Partisans received the arms and equipment from the Italians. This is signed by Gen. Becuzzi of the Italian Bergamo Division, Gen. Popovic and Dr. Ribar representing the Partisans, Maj. Deakin and Capt. Burke for the British Mission and myself as American Representative.
- f. One photostat of captured document showing Chetnik collaboration with the Italians.
- g. Ninety-eight pictures segregated into ten envelopes for identification. These pictures composed the collection of the "SLOBODNA DALMACIJA" and were given to me by the editor, SERIF SEHOVIC.

Note: All the enclosures and information in this report were turned over to Major Huot on 24 October 1943 for delivery to O.S.S. Cairo.

C
O
P
Y

Dear Benny:

I am staying at your old place. My job is liaison officer and interpreter at the Naval H.Q. I hope, Benny, to see you soon. Everbody here is speaking of you. You have certainly left a good impression and done good work for the U.S.

I am forwarding you, through Mr. Martin (who is leaving to-night), the Album, which I had got for you from the "Slobodna Dalmacija" newspaper.

Best luck!

Yours very sincerely,

"Pat"

(Prof. Petricki)

17 Dec. '43

Note: The album referred to in this letter contained a complete collection of Partisan pictures taken by their official photographer. This album was turned over to Lt. Col. Paul West, OSS-ME.

C
O
P
Y

20. XII. 43

My Dear Benny:

I hear from my Courier that you are 'Going out', I wish you the best of luck on your trip and hope that you will be back with us soon.

It was a pleasure to have you with me in Split and throughout that weary retreat. The assistance you gave to refugees on a long, long grind is still talked about by the Partisans in this Corps. They continually ask me, 'Where is our Friend Benny? He will be back won't he?' I hope so Benny. I have never enjoyed working so much with a Brother Officer and sincerely trust we shall have that opportunity again.

Sincerely,

John E. Burke

Major J. E. Burke
Officer Commanding
British Military Mission
Dalmatia

1 January 1944

SUBJECT: Additional Observations

TO : The Director, OSS-ME

1. In the interests of OSS and on behalf of all men in the field, I wish to make these observations.

2. When I went on Operations last August, Major Louis Huot was my immediate senior officer. Major Huot gave me what little briefing I received. Neither Col. Amoss nor Col. Guenther saw me in reference to the operation I was going on. Mr. Macfarland, whom I understood had interest in the Yugoslav operation, did not discuss any details with me and only made one suggestion, namely, that he would be interested in the possibilities of landing aircraft in Partisan liberated territory.

3. Major Huot made a surprise visit at Jajce on 24 October 1943. He arrived there on the late afternoon of the 23rd and got in touch with me at noon on the following day. I gave him the following:

a. A verbal report on what I knew about the Partisan officers with whom he had been in conversation, also as much general information as I had learned during the better than two months I had spent with the Partisans;

b. Photostats of some 55 captured documents showing Cetnik collaboration with the enemy. These photostats had been prepared for me by Tito's staff at my request;

c. About a dozen envelopes containing collections of pictures taken by Partisans and given to me by the editor of the newspaper "Sloboda Dalmacijan". The necessary information about the pictures was written on the envelopes. Also recent issues of Partisan newspapers;

d. Four exposed rolls of 35 mm film (36 pictures per roll) which I had personally taken in Bosnia, including several shots of Tito, and in Dalmatia during the advance into Split immediately after the Italian capitulation and the subsequent evacuation of Split;

e. A fifth roll of my own exposed film was sent to Major Huot at Bari on 4 November together with a detailed report on my visit to the front line on the Peljesac peninsula.

f. My copy of the Italian Armistice agreement which was drawn up at Split. This document had the following signatures: Gen. Emilio Becuzzi, Commander of the Italian "Bergamo" division; Major Deakin and Captain Burke for the British Mission and myself as American representative.

4. I have read Major Huot's report on his visit to Marshal Tito's headquarters in Jajce. In this lengthy account I cannot find any of the things I mention above referred to.

5. Neither at Bari nor at Cairo have I been able to locate my pictures or photostats. The Partisan pictures were located today in a filing cabinet and had not been given to SO.

6. It has been a continuous embarrassment to me that my pictures were not returned. (Huot assured me of several copies.) Many of my best Partisan friends have been asking for their promised copies. Also, Lt. Col. Deakin of the British Mission, with whom I worked in Bosnia, was promised copies of my pictures. My failure to deliver is very awkward, and not in the interests of OSS since Lt. Col. Deakin is now the head of the Yugoslav Desk at M.O.4.

7. During my first two months in Partisan territory up to the time Major Huot visited me at Jajce, I see by the file that four messages were sent to me. Of these four messages, one has never reached me and a second one reached me in November after Major Huot's visit.

Personal Signal Sent to Lt. Ben Welles at Cairo
from VIS

"NOV. 18, BENNY TO WELLES, RECEIVED YOUR LETTER OF 10 OCTOBER. MANY THANKS AND PLEASE WRITE AGAIN. HAVE NOT SEEN ANSON. THE BRITISH ARE MEETING THE GERMAN THREAT TO THESE ISLANDS WITH MORE LIAISON OFFICERS AND BATMEN. I WOULD BE ON THE COAST BUT THERE ARE DEFINITE ORDERS TO KEEP ME HERE ON VIS. I PRESUME THAT YOU GET DAILY SITUATION REPORTS FROM ISLD AND MO4. ALL IS WELL THIS SIDE AND HUOT SHIPPING LINE IS OPERATING EFFECTIVELY."

Note: The underlined portion in above signal was objected to by Brigadier MacLean. Somehow this signal received general distribution and reached General Wilson, CIC of the Mediterranean Theatre, who got in touch with Brigadier MacLean for explanations. Later Brigadier MacLean talked to Lt. Col. Paul West, OSS-ME who because of this had me recalled to Cairo on December 22, 1943. In conversation with Lt. Col. West and Major General Stowell, C.O. of Force 133 Cairo, it was agreed that the matter would be dropped provided I directed a letter of apology to Brigadier MacLean. This was done. At the time the signal was sent, I was the only American with the Partisans and on the islands alone (VIS, HVAR, BRAC, & KORCULA) Brigadier MacLean had fourteen British Officers who had forty-five other Englishmen with them. Shortly afterwards several British personnel were withdrawn from Partisan territory.

APPENDIX - 8 -

7 January 1944

Brig. MacLean,
Force 133,
M.E.F.

I am exceedingly sorry that a personal signal sent by me caused you annoyance. It was most indiscreet of me to include such a remark. You may be assured of my complete loyalty to the Allied Military Mission under your command.

Please accept my apology.

MELVIN O. BENSON
Capt. A.C.

Note: Lt. Col. Paul West sent the above letter to Brig. MacLean along with a letter of his own. Later brig. MacLean and Lt. Col. West met at a conference in Bari and my apology was accepted verbally. Brig. MacLean stating that he would be glad to have me as a member of any mission under his command.